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Select Platforms to Enhance Personalization and Transmedia Engagement to Support Effective Language Learning

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ANNOTATION

Transmedia is steadily gaining ground in education. A transmedia learning environment is immersive and engaging and presents the potential to meet the needs of 21st Century learners. This paper looks into the design stage of a transmedia learning project targeted to English as Second Language learners and explores aspects concerning the integration of learning goals and strategies within the structure of the project. In this manner, we hope to contribute to the development of transmedia learning environments.

KEY WORDS: English as Second Language, Transmedia Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Transmedia is a concept rooted in the entertainment area, however its use in education is becoming more common. As learning environments are being redefined in order to meet today's learners' needs, digital media, social media platforms, augmented reality and mobile devices become the tools of trade for educators - “(...) the Net Gen identifies with media and technology. Today learning with the new media involves a social process of participation in a shared culture” [1]. Transmedia is an approach of educational value as it provides multiple entry points to learning and is in alignment with the most recent orientations for the design of new learning paradigms. Addressing the required transformation of learning and teaching practices, different reports such as System Upgrade [2]; Learner at the Center of a Networked World [3]; Transmedia Play [4] and Connected Learning [5] have come to light. More than providing pedagogical frameworks based on learners' media consumption and production tendencies, these documents supply valuable guidelines for educators to accommodate the move into learner-centered environments. At the core of the reports Transmedia Play and Connected Learning lies the need to enhance collaborative practices and engage learners through the use of media. “The disconnect between classroom learning and the everyday lives and interests of many young people is not new.” [5] The question is “How can we capitalize on today's new media to expand these forms of learning

opportunity?" [5]. Creative transmedia storyworlds are participatory spaces and can engage learners in the creation of their own stories and production of artefacts while developing learning paths. Wolf points out "imaginary worlds are enjoyed not only by those who visit them, but also by those who invent them. (...) They are often transnarrative and transmedial in form. Stories written by different authors can be set in the same world, so imaginary worlds can be transauthorial as well" [6]. The affinity spaces created by the players of MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft or League of Legends are the evidence that imaginary worlds are shaped by players. Moreover, they are spaces in which learning processes occur - "players socialize within the game, and they come together in fan sites to discuss, critique, analyse, and mod the game" [7] Gee & Hayes stress that "the game beyond the game" encourages the development of skills related to "technology, design, system thinking and sociotechnical engineering." [7]. Not only 21st Century learners play, they are also taking advantage of the possibilities available in the media landscape to weave their stories across multiple platforms - they "do not see narrative as text-based only; rather they view narrative as a multimedia enterprise" [8]. Since Transmedia Storytelling mirrors the learners' dynamics in the media ecosystem, it can be perceived as a way to capitalize on learning opportunities. The use of storytelling as a learning tool is not new. Stories lend themselves to learning. As Frank Rosen points out, storytelling is "a symbiotic exchange between teller and listener. (...) We use stories to make sense of our world and to share that understanding with others. They are the signal within the noise" [9]. The art of storytelling is taken to a new dimension when combined with a transmedia approach. Jenkins defines Transmedia Storytelling as "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" [10]. For learners it's an opportunity to "seek out content through active hunting and gathering processes while crisscrossing various media platforms [10] and evaluate ideas with others. [11]. Hence, creating a transmedia learning environment provides the learners the "opportunity to be deeply immersed in a topic. (...) They concurrently use technology tools for exploration as they develop narrative and characters that will provide others with a learning, as well as play, experience [11]. In order to tap into how a transmedia learning environment might be stimulated, the following sections describe the theoretical framework, as well as, the design phase of a transmedia learning project which is currently being used as basis of research for this subject.

Similar to the Connected Learning report, Learner at the Center of a Networked World [3] focuses on promoting learning networks that "allow learners and teachers alike to connect directly to resources, people and activities" [3]. The Aspen Task Force on Learning and the Internet presents five principles and a set of recommendations that might enhance learning experiences: "learners need to be at the center of new learning networks; every student should have access to learning networks; learning networks need to be interoperable; learners should have the literacies necessary to utilize media as well as safeguard themselves in the digital age and students should have safe and trusted environments for learning" [3]. Though aimed at a wider scope of application (an educational system), part of the set of recommendations [3], listed below, were considered in the setting of the learning ecosystem within the project; access to the media platforms; possible interactions between platforms and media artefact production activities: 1. Redesign learning environments to empower learners to learn any time, any place, and at any pace, both in school and beyond; 2. Enhance the ability of

educators to support and guide learners in a networked learning environment; 3. Build an infrastructure that will connect all students in all of the places they learn; 4. Support the maximum feasible degree of interoperability across learning networks; Table I. Application of the hero's journey 5. Adopt policies to incorporate digital, media and social-emotional literacies as basic skills for living and learning in the digital age. The report System Upgrade: Realising the vision for UK education [2] addresses 12 key issues that promote the use of digital literacy: connect; share; analyze; assess; apply; personalize; engage; streamline; include; know; compute and construct. These aspects apply on various levels to the design of different learning experiences and were used as reference in the conception of the learning opportunities integrated in the project.

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